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ABSTRACT

Although gender, race, and class are often perceived as three separate issues, the intersection of gender, race, and class holds true, whether the researcher is trying to analyze the elements of a group's identity or trying to analyze the social structures that create this identity. A symposium was organized around three separate narrative research projects, which illustrate how gender, race, and class are interconnected in the lives of the women interviewed. This paper delineates the three projects: (1) Lynn Zimmerman's project examined issues of identity and community in white southern culture and community through the narratives of white and black middle class southern women; (2) Laura McQueen examined the role of community and connection in nursing education through the narratives of white and black nursing educators; and (3) Gwendolyn Guy conducted research which focused on issues of class in the black community by analyzing the narratives of upper middle class black women, who are members of an elite service/friendship club. The paper notes that each of these projects illustrates the importance of providing a new way of understanding and connecting to one another through education. (BT)

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Connecting Women's Voices: A Symposium on the Intersection of Gender, Race, and Class

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Like the specialist who often looks at a particular part of the body rather than assessing the functioning of the body as a whole, social researchers often focus on one aspect of the lives of the group they are researching, neglecting the other influences in the lives and experiences of the participants. Gender, race, and class are aspects that are often perceived as three separate issues. By analyzing the lived experience of 21 women, this symposium demonstrates that gender, race, and class are closely interconnected and cannot be studied in isolation. This intersection holds true whether the researcher is trying to analyze the elements of a group's identity or whether trying to analyze the social structures that create this identity.

Feminist theorists, such as Elizabeth Spelman, and bell hooks, support this notion of the interconnectedness of social classifications and group identity. Elizabeth Spelman (Young, 1997) argues that gender cannot be viewed alone as one's identity. She argues that class, sexual orientation, race and other collective identities also play a role in the person's life, and that multiple genders should be discussed, such as black, middle-class women or white, middle-class women. She does caution that such designations should not be taken too far in analysis, however, or groups, which are useful in examining social issues, will dissolve into individual identities. In her discussion of social class and race, bell hooks (2000) says that although social class formation among blacks started prior to slavery, "collectively, black folks in the United States have never wanted to highlight the issue of class and class exploitation, even though there have always been diverse caste and class groups among African-Americans"(p.8).

This symposium is organized around 3 separate narrative research projects, which illustrate how gender, race, and class are interconnected in the lives of the women interviewed. Narrative research methodology, an interpretive method of research, is not concerned with generalizations so much as it is particularity – how each person views their own experiences. The researcher looks for patterns within the individual narrative and across narratives. This holistic approach to interpreting narratives draws attention to the interconnections in the experiences of the participants. Within each of the projects presented in the symposium, and among the three projects, the themes of race, gender, and class were common.

The project of Lynn W. Zimmerman, Assistant Professor of Multicultural Education at Purdue University-Calumet, examined issues of identity and community in white Southern culture and community through the narratives of white and black middle class Southern women. In the analysis of Southern identity, race plays a primary role. Black women are shaped by their race, because the society in which they live makes race a large part of their identity. White women on the other hand, tend not to see the importance of race in their identity. For them, gender roles and class are more important for creating their identity. Historically class has been viewed as a white rather than a black issue. Gender roles also greatly affect how race is perceived by these women. The patriarchal Southern society historically created separate gender roles and social spheres for men and women, and for white people and black people, so that the gender roles of white and black women did not always coincide.

The research of Laura McQueen, Assistant Professor of Nursing at NC A&T University, examined the role of community and connection in nursing education through the narratives of

white and black nursing educators. The analysis of the narratives of nurse educators highlights the complexity of women's socialization in educational institutions. In many ways, nurse educators support the current socialization of nurses through deference to the male-dominated patriarchal institution of healthcare, and healthcare education. Likewise, nurses typically exemplify characteristics of oppressed people in that they adopt the values of the oppressors (Friere, 1970). Consequently, the intersection of gender, race, and class of nurses relates specifically to how women nurses adopt and transmit these values. Education, including the education of nurses, is not neutral. It is complexly value-laden in how it socializes students in schools of nursing to create a product for male-dominated healthcare delivery systems.

Gwendolyn A. Guy, Assistant Professor of Educational Foundations at East Carolina University, conducted research which focussed on issues of class in the black community by analyzing the narratives of upper middle class black women who are members of an elite service/friendship club. This explicates the extent and persistence of silence about issues of class and gender within their elite friendship/service organization and the Black community. These African American club women of privilege interpret what they do as "making community, thereby continuing in the long tradition of race uplift" (Hine, 1994, p. xxi). The complexity of class, race, and gender relationships within the Black community is inseparable from the history and culture of Black people. The club women act within the confines of structures of oppression to make changes within their community. They have also learned alternative ways to act outside the structures. They use their organization to foster educational enrichment programs for youth in the community. They take pride in the organization and the various outreach effort initiatives. While they promote community uplift and talk freely about their club involvement, the women are silent about issues of class and gender relationships within the community. These women's stories reveal the importance "to think of class not as an identity owned by an individual but as a series of relations that pervade the entire society and shape our social institutions and relationships with each other" (Anderson & Collins, 1992, p. 63).

Southern Women and Race

The purpose of Zimmerman's narrative research project was to examine issues of identity and community in the South through the narratives of six middle class Southern women. The six women interviewed had Southern parents, and had spent most or all of their lives in the South. The women ranged in age from 30 to 60 years old. Four of the women were white, and two of the women were black.

Because of its history of slavery, race is a core existential issue in the South. Therefore, in the analysis of Southern identity, race plays a primary role. Although race and gender are intertwined for Southern women, both white and black, race is perceived differently by the two groups. As evidenced in this study, when and how the black women and the white women talk about race is different. Race was not mentioned by any of the white women in their original narratives about their childhoods. They talked about race only after I asked them about the South; then race was the first thing that most of the white women mentioned. The black women, however, talked about race at various places throughout their narratives. Because the society in which they live makes race a large part of their identity, black women are aware of being shaped by their race. White women, on the other hand, see gender roles and class as important for creating their identity. These women do not see race as a central identity issue.

The comments of a 30 year old black woman participant makes this difference in perceptions very plain. Although she had described her mother and sister as typical Southern

women who abided by the traditional gender roles of Southern men and women, when I asked her about herself as a Southern woman, she said,

> when I think of Southern women, really, I, I don't know why, I don't think of black women. I think of Southern women and, you know, big hair, and women put on a pedestal, and I don't know why I don't think of black women, but if I were to think of myself as a black Southern woman, I, I feel a distinction between black and white women I think black women probably would be compared more to men and, and white women, maybe are, like I said, are more put on a pedestal, and considered, you know, pretty and docile and all those things. And that, that makes me think about that poem, ain't I a woman, too. And I think that stemmed a lot from, you know, Southern women being put on a pedestal, and maybe black women were marginalized. So when I, I think of myself as a Southern woman, I have to really think about, because I really think about white women for some reason when I hear that.

When another black woman, who is about 60 years old, talked about herself as a Southern woman, she did not make the distinction between being a Southern white woman and a Southern black woman. She talked instead about gender roles and how as a woman she feels it is her responsibility to take care of her family and her community. Although she did not distinguish between black and white Southern women, she, like the younger woman, talked about race and racial issues in other parts of her narrative about her childhood. Having grown up in rural North Carolina during the time of strict segregation in the South, her experiences were quite different from the younger black woman's. Although she said that there was not much racial tension in the rural area where she grew up, she did experience overt racism and discrimination.

> In the South, you knew that there were certain things that were Jim Crow that you couldn't ride the bus, or this or that. You knew there were certain things that you had to do, like you knew that you couldn't go in some restaurants. There were some things you didn't even bother to go to. Whereas up North a lot of them would say, well I went in there just to start some trouble. And, we, we were taught that you don't start a lot of trouble and when the laws passed where we could go, of course, we bombarded these restaurants and all these things just to see what it was like and after we got in there, hey, their food's not as good as ours, as we'd thought.

For her, Jim Crow limited what she could and could not do, and created a dependency on white employers. Despite this, she talks of having pride in being Southern and of the independent spirit of the South.

The narrative of one of the white women who grew up in this same rural area tells the story differently. When she was talking about the South, this 40 year-old white woman mentioned that "race relations are strained", but when she talked about her life in general and as a Southern woman, she did not refer to her race. There was a tension for her between not wanting to be stereotyped as a Southern white racist, while feeling conflicted about race relations. On the one hand, she says that the rural area where she grew up did not have the racial tensions that were experienced in other areas. Despite her saying that blacks and whites got along where she lived and that they associated freely with one another, there was some slippage, when she said,

> Most people who weren't overtly racist still felt very uncomfortable with mixing with the other race. And that's black people and white people who felt very uncomfortable, wary of each other.

Throughout her discourse about race, I heard how complex an issue this is for her. As an individual, she wants to be fair and equitable in her dealings with all people. She did not witness nor engage in overt acts of racial discrimination when she was growing up, although she knew they existed. She had some black friends. However, she finds that her being a white Southerner makes her a target for accusations of bigotry and racism, which she feels do not apply to her. While she agrees that there has been systemic and institutionalized racism in the South, several times she made remarks that racism is not just a Southern problem.

One of the other white women who has lived in various parts of the South and in Germany, also did not mention race in her narrative until asked about the South. One of her first comments then was that attitudes toward blacks in middle Alabama was different from the attitudes she experienced while living on military bases, even those in the South. The prevailing attitude in middle Alabama was that of "the black community being considered such low-class, unworthy, undeserving, etc. group of people" while "the military area was equal and didn't have as much of the prejudice."

In her narrative about her childhood, a 30 year-old white woman, also never mentioned race. However, the first comment she made when I asked about the South was about race.

> I feel really, really aware of black and white. Specifically black and white more so than, like, Asian and, you know, other, other cultures. And I feel like there have been a lot of really sort of historically big moments that have affected me and touched me directly because I, I live here. Like the 1979 KKK shootout at Morningside Homes. Those kinds of things. I feel like, I feel really affected by them.

For the white women, race is something that is exterior to them. It is around them, but not really about them. Race is a not a part of their consciousness in the way it is for the black women. The white women see race as something that others have. They also tend to equate race with racism. The black women on the other hand, view their race as part of who they are. It affects how others see them and how they see themselves. The black women talked about certain behaviors and attitudes that they have internalized, and some of their experiences are clear illustrations of how the "gaze", how others see one, affects one's "voice", how one presents oneself. For them, race defined some of the opportunities and experiences that were available to them. Race also is tied to community for the black women in this study. The older black woman in particular talked about "giving back to her community", which means helping the other black people who make up her community. None of the white women equated community with race in this same way.

Other than the racial considerations, there were similarities among the experiences of all the women. Several talked about family history and connections to the South through family and friends. Several of the women also talked about the South as the historical and cultural place that has shaped who they are as women and as Southern women. Some of the participants talked about the role of religion in their lives, while some of them talked about the importance of education. Although each woman experienced and talked about education and schooling differently, each saw it as a place where they learned something beyond the subject matter they were being taught. Perhaps, it was a place to make friends, or a place to prepare for a career, or a place to learn how to fit into the white Southern community. For some, it was a place where one's race made a difference. Whatever else they may have learned in school, subject matter and coursework did not carry the weight that these other "educational" experiences did.

Gender and Race in Nursing Education

The complexity of education's affects on women's socialization and creation of identity is not neutral. It has profound effects on their career choices and perceptions of how they live in the world. In examining McQueen's research project on women nurse educators, there are both similarities and differences in nurse's socialization and forming of identity based on the intersection of gender, race, and socioeconomic class. The stories told by women nurses in this study reflect the participants' perceptions and interpretations of nursing education and practice as it relates to their "situatedness" as women of a particular race and privilege in patriarchal education and healthcare institutions.

This study focused on the interpretative traditions and lived experiences of three white nurse educators and two black nurse educators. Each of these educators has twenty-five years or more teaching experiences at either predominately white or historically black colleges and universities in the Southeast. In their narratives, these women discuss their experiences as women, nurses, and educators in the context of their personal experiences and their positions as women nurses in a white male "medical model" of positivistic education and practice.

Most of the women in this study fail to acknowledge, or perhaps fail to recognize, nursing's connection to patriarchy and its oppression. The white women discussed the male physicians, clergy, and college administrators as having legitimate power in their education and healthcare practice settings. However, the black nurse educators did not proffer legitimate power to patriarchy at anytime during their interviews.

For the white women in this study, their narratives began with a discussion of their "choice" of nursing schools. Here, one of the white respondents describes the prestige in attending a highly rated diploma nursing school in the Northeast, "Two thousand applicants, and they only took a hundred students, who were the stellar envy of this school". Focal to her discourse is a lack of respect she feels when advancing her education at a less recognized baccalaureate four-year nursing school. She also felt the difficulties found in nursing today relate to lack of respect issues between women nurses. In her narrative, she elaborated on this issue of respect at six different times during her interview. The following are examples of her discourse on respect:

> "Doctors, everyone just treated us with respect, always", " I was always treated respectfully", "Probably as a student I got treated more respectfully than as a nurse in the South", and "Respect is missing, pride is missing".

This nurse's discourse demonstrates class privilege as well as her expectation of being valued as a competent white nurse in healthcare delivery. In her narrative she voices complete dissatisfaction with the disrespect and disharmony between nurses. However in the end, this participant settles on a defining theme for nursing's difficulties, "I think it is a twofold problem. I think that management encourages it, and nursing tolerates it". In this quote she identifies her perception of the relationship of power and (not mentioned) male authority that have long plagued nursing education and practice. Notably missing is nursing's connection to patriarchy and its role in nursing's oppression. In many ways, her language could be identified as "me focused" and not as women failing to recognize the influence of patriarchy and privilege.

In contrast, the black nurse educators in this project began their narratives by describing their experiences at historically black schools of nursing. Rather than discussing prestige and respect, these women began their narratives detailing the "understood" experiences for the few educated black women of their era. One of the black participant's narrative describes her early experiences in nursing school:

You often times had to leave the city, actually leave the city because of the lack of equality, you had to go to whatever was left, and if there was nothing left, you essentially had to go outside of that to get an education.. I was actually in Jacksonville, Florida, even though I went to school in Tallahassee. Myself and my peers conducted a group, and these students from Tuskegee came to Maryland to get that kind of experience.

Another black participant describes a similar experience:
The current focus of Winston Salem at that time was teaching, and nursing. There was no other option open for women at that time. This was a time of segregation. We had three months residency for psychiatric nursing in Maryland, because we could not attend the psychiatric facilities in Winston-Salem. Then we went to Harlem, to Harlem Hospital for OB

Although not indicated in their narratives, the black women in this project had a modicum of class privilege in their ability to attend college and then return as educators at historically black colleges and universities. The most striking words in their narratives indicate their realization and awareness of race and its implication in the United States. Conspicuously missing in their discourse are expectations of respect or valuing from white schools or predominately white healthcare delivery systems. However, included in their responses, I found persuasive evidence supporting both a strong sense of community and the construction of legitimate power from their own schools of education. Importantly, this legitimate power and strength of community are socially constructed to elevate the next generation of young black women and to ensure survival of their race. For these women, there is an "understood" awareness and evidence of white supremacy, hierarchy, and privilege in both education and healthcare.

The importance of "education as survival" is the predominate pedagogy of the black respondents in this project. Respect is not discussed because the women already feel respected by their community. These women understand they will be respected for their engaged efforts for a collective struggle for survival of the black community and they "understand" the lack of respect they have experienced and received from the white community. In contrast, the white nurses believe respect is individually obtained through acceptance and entry into white patriarchy and its hierarchy. These differences in approaches assist in illustrating how gender, race, and class privilege are interconnected in the lives of the participants in this study.

The intersection of gender, race, and class in this study relates specifically to one's situatedness, as a woman, of a particular race and its privilege within patriarchal educational and healthcare institutions. For each of these women, I found similarities and differences in their lived experiences based on their interpretative traditions and awareness of the complexity of their lives as women. This study creates an awareness of different privileges for women and for understanding issues surrounding the lack of privilege and race for other women. These differences are not only found in education, but also in the participants situatedness in gender, race, class, and lived experiences. Similarly, these women's educational experiences appear to remain the existential issue for finding "one's place" in American society. In effect, this finding of place can be observed, individually as either a white woman seeking respect, autonomy, and recognition or a black woman receiving respect or valuing through collective work for their community. In the end, these women are connected by the intersection of their gender, race, and socioeconomic class that together help create their social construction as women in America.

Club Women and Community Consciousness

Guy's narrative research project focused on analyzing the narratives of upper middle class black women who are members of an elite service/friendship club. Her research uncovered issues of race in society at large, and issues of class within the black community.

The concept of community uplift is deeply embedded in the African American psyche. Slavery and the will to survive compelled the race to work together as a people in pursuit of freedom and equality. The challenges were harsh, difficult and oftentimes deadly. Immediately following the period of slavery, Reconstruction created false hopes and dreams for the newly freed slaves. One of the most ostensible manifestations of this period in the South is known as Jim Crow. It was the "systematic practice of discriminating against and segregating Black people, especially as practiced in the American South from the end of Reconstruction to the mid 20th century" (American Heritage Dictionary 2000, p. 941).

Jim Crow shaped the lives of southern Blacks for decades, these nine women included. The women in this research project share stories of attending all Black two-room schools as they rode the bus past all-White schools. As one of the women explained, the disparity between White and Black schools was loss on her innocence as a child. The women talk extensively about family, the importance of getting an education and family pride. Somehow, each of them understood that education was an important component for a successful life. Parents, relatives and community members encouraged their children to secure an education. These clubwomen share how parents and community provided a caring, and nurturing environment, which in many situations sheltered them from the harshness of racial segregation and discrimination.

One woman recalled her journey from a two-room schoolhouse in a rural North Carolina town into academia earning her PhD from the prestigious Duke University. She spoke candidly about her childhood years growing up on a farm with ten siblings. Although there were some painful memories, this woman shared her story with a sense of triumph and pride. She stated:

> But, you know things were not easy when I look back on it; things were not easy for us coming along. But at the time we didn't know that things were not easy. For example, when I went to a two-room school, until I was what—seventh or eighth grade . . .you know, it never registered with me that what kind of education is this I'm getting in a two-room school with old, torn up books and one teacher trying to teach three of four grades
> and so on.

Her description confirms the inequality of attending a segregated school. However, in retrospect she has a deep appreciation for her parents and what they endured to ensure her success. This woman's narrative avoids the use of victimization, but instead magnifies the character traits of her parents and community as resilient and resistant in the face of the harsh realities of segregation. These parents demonstrated strength of character, fortitude, and perseverance against destructive and oppressive forces leveled against their humanity. She continued the reflection of her earlier years in the rural south. She remembered:

> I mean it never dawned on me that this is no way to get an education . . . We seemed to have been doing alright and then it never dawned on me when I finished that we had to ride for miles and miles on the bus to go—because there was only one high school in the whole county for Blacks at that time. Well, yeah, at that time there was never but one.

Aside from club membership, the role of educator links the nine women in this research. Each of the women became teachers in public schools and for some, college professors. Separate and

unequal education was meant to keep Blacks at a disadvantage politically, and economically. Yet the success of these women can be traced to a strong endorsement of education by their parents, many of their parents did not have the advantage of an education themselves. The professions available to Black women from the eighteenth century through the mid twentieth century were teaching and nursing (Hine, 1994). Despite the inferior training of the Black teachers and the obvious disparities existent in the education of these women, Black teachers exercised agency by providing their students with more than an academic curriculum. They offered students encouragement to pursue their dreams, and to aspire to leadership roles within the Black community. Educators had the ability to transform their immediate community and the larger society if given an opportunity.

Similar to their predecessors, these clubwomen strive to ensure the survival of the race. They share many of the hopes and dreams for youth of a new generation of African Americans that their parents held for them. The time and money they invest as part of their organization's mission to provide opportunities for young African American students to get a college education reflect this goal. A tradition of community uplift through educational achievement is a continuation of the earlier club movement and it is expected that giving back in the form of service is a responsibility of those who (have made it) in keeping with community progress. Some of the women use their credentials as educators and community leaders to promote programs that address some of the needs of young, poor and disadvantaged youth. As retirees, a few of the club women have used their academic experiences to initiate a variety of projects to assist children in math, computer science, and reading, along with strategies to enhance esteem building.

In many ways these nine club women continue to act as "keepers of the culture," not unlike the Black club women of the eighteenth and nineteenth century who used their talents, education and influence for race survival (Williams, 1993). There are strong similarities between this contemporary organization of women and clubwomen of the past. The educated, middle class women belonging to these clubs consider it their civic responsibility to address social problems within the Black community. For these women there are issues of social class privilege, which often creates tension among non-members of their organization and those who are disadvantaged. Much of what this club represents to those who are not members is class stratification. The Black middle class is no longer physically within reach of the disadvantaged Blacks. Many are now living as suburbanites and seemingly enjoying success with their white counterparts.

For many the perception of women in an organization that adheres to a closed and exclusive membership supports the idea of elitism and snobbery. However, this organization of women is actively involved in what they see as projects to dispel the notion that they are out of touch with the masses as they work to close the gap brought about by economic disparity and racism. Even so, the question of class continues to be one that is too often glossed over or dismissed within the African American community. Hooks (2000) contends "collectively, black folks in the United States have never highlighted the issue of class and class exploitation, even though there have always been diverse caste and class groups among African-Americans" (p.8).

Important to this research project is where do these women stand on the many social issues facing the African American community and in particular the issues of class and gender. Throughout each woman's narrative the issue of class is implied but gender issues were never mentioned. One participant talked about the impact of getting an education as a source of liberation from poverty. She shared:

> You know, I'm the first in my family on both sides my mother and my father to go to college. So you know you're talking about things that are available to first generation college student. I was the first to receive a terminal degree, and I've been an inspiration for some of the people who came after me—my cousin.

Her sense of professional development and social mobility are associated with the attainment of a good education. This theme resonated as a thread in each of the narratives. This idea is fundamental to the organization of which she is a member, making it obvious how class status can be negotiated. These women have been socialized to believe that once racial discrimination is eradicated or abated, then equal opportunity for all is possible. According to Hooks (2000), the structure and the hierarchy of social class in our society "mystifies" class. Therefore, interclass conflict between Blacks is considered benign compared to racism within the dominant White society.

Although these women are silent about issues of class and gender, noted historian African American Darlene Hine (1994) offers several possible interpretations for silence. She believes that growing up in a racist society carries "deep psychological and social wounds." Hines writes:

> For three and a half centuries Afro-American women have carried special burdens. They have responded in dichotomous ways: by protesting racial and sexual discrimination or by somehow avoiding it by rationalizing the psychological impact of racism and sexism or by transcending their victimization (p. 3).

It is possible that these nine clubwomen recognize gender and class oppression within the Black community, but have purposefully chosen to work within the structures of community building to educate in order to liberate. The need for a social discourse of gender and class oppression is clear. Yet, the age of these women, the historical, cultural and social context in which they grew up in can be perceived as barriers to a more inclusive critique of the intersection of race, class and gender issues.

Conclusion

Each of these projects illustrates the intersection of gender, race, and class in how these women perceive themselves and their place in their communities. Each of these projects also illustrates the importance of providing a new way of understanding and connecting to one another through education. Education is not neutral, therefore it is important to appraise the individual, group, and community bias, stereotypes, and cultural norms and values reproduced in educational settings, and to examine how this intersects the unspoken ideologies embedded in gender, race and social class. Bell hooks (1994) advocates creating a classroom community that builds and creates a climate of openness and intellectual thought, "making the classroom a democratic setting where everyone feels a responsibility to contribute is a central goal to transformative pedagogy" (hooks, p. 39). It requires a willingness to change instructional methodologies to support cooperative learning with freedom to express ideas. It requires a willingness to approach education in the classroom to include awareness of race, class, and gender. School discourse should enlighten us to share and to connect with others lives and experiences and to challenge educational constructs that do not educate for critical consciousness of self and group identity.

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